

THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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THE WICKED WOODS OF TOBEREEVIL.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "HESTER'S HISTORY."

CHAPTER IV. LIFE AND DEATH.

SIR JOHN and Lady Archbold, who lived at Camlough in the hills, had an only daughter, about a year older than May. They loved this child better than their own souls and bodies, and as much as they hated the thought of death; which is saying a good deal. The fame of the beauty and spirit of this girl had travelled to Monasterlea, and many a time May had stood on tiptoe, looking over the hedges, to see her riding past by her father's side, with her yellow hair streaming on the wind.

The little girl at Camlough was one of May's dream-playmates. She had many such companions, who shared all her confidences, and joined in her games. Another was the grim stone angel of the passage, who was petted and talked to in the daylight, but rather shunned when the night began to come on. The girl from Camlough was May's especial friend. This little person was always supposed to be at hand, and her opinion was taken on all subjects. So fond was May of this little girl, that she would sit for hours upon the highest step of the belfry-stairs, gazing through a hole in the ruined wall across the land towards Camlough. There, behind the Golden Mountain, she was told there stood a castle of delights, of which her friend was a princess. Wonderful travelling carriages would appear upon the lonesome road, on their way to this palace of enchantment. May had once been at the inn at the foot of the mountain, where Sir John's huge oxen were kept in

waiting for his guests. She had seen the horses taken out and the oxen yoked to, and the fine ladies screaming a little, when the oxen began to pull and the carriages began moving up the fine paved road cut in the steep mountain's face. From her belfry she could trace the movement of the oxen on that distant road, could watch them to the very rim of the crown of the mountain, see them quiver there a moment against the sun, then drop out of her sight into unknown realms of bliss.

But the little girl at Camlough fell sick. The palace of delights was a saddened palace. The echo of the anguish of those parents who knew not how to suffer was heard over the moors and through the hills. The child was sick to death; rallied, fell back, wasted, and grew weaker, and at last was given over as incurable. Doctors took their way from Camlough. It was said that Lady Archbold quarrelled with the last who lingered, and would have waited a little longer; that she ordered him from the place because he would not tell her that her child should surely live. Then the frantic parents gave way to despair.

One hot dark night, Midsummer Eve, Katherine Archbold lay in a trance like death. Her father was sitting by her bed. Her mother walked about the room close by, mad with rebellious agony. The short darkness of the warm summer night hung heavily on this dwelling of luxury. The silver lamps burned softly, and the odour of flowers came through the open windows. The servants were afraid to sleep, knowing that at any moment death might arrive. And after that they knew not what to expect. For her ladyship was determined that the child should not die.

There was a poor fool sitting down in

the kitchen, muttering to himself as idiots do, and nobody was minding him. He was an idiot from birth, one of those who "live among the people." He wandered from place to place, and was welcome everywhere; for people say such as he bring luck.

This poor lad was sitting in the kitchen of the castle of Camlough while Katherine Archbold lay dying up-stairs. The cook had placed meat and beer before him, but the fool had heard rumours of the trouble that was in the place, and he would not eat as usual. Not that he cared much for the young lady herself, for she had often tormented him; not that he cared much for Lady Archbold, who seldom bestowed notice on such as he; but his simple heart was sore for Sir John. Sir John always threw him a shilling when he passed him, and sent him to the cook to get his dinner; and he nodded to him and smiled at him, and Con the idiot knew a smile from a frown.

Two or three servants were talking of the deadliness of the child's disease, of the uselessness of doctors, of the grief of the father and mother, and of fifty things besides. All at once Con started from his seat, and sped to the kitchen door.

"Hollo, my boy!" cried the cook, "you stay here for the night!"

But Con only flung a grin of delight over his shoulder, and disappeared; not out of doors, but, to the dismay of all present, up-stairs, where he had no business to be.

Sir John, sitting by the side of his daughter, with his face buried in his hands, felt a touch upon his shoulder, and looked up with a great start. There were Con's white face and black eyes gleaming at him in the dull light of the sick-room.

"Master!" said the idiot, caressingly.

Sir John was about to shake him off, but the great tenderness and sympathy in the lad's face caught his attention.

"Master, take miss down mounntain!" said the fool in an excited whisper; and he pointed with his finger to the open window, beyond which the day was already breaking, leaving the dark peaks of the hills all naked against the pale rifts between the clouds.

"Father Felix, master! Father Felix, master!"

Sir John started again, and a flush rose to his face. He guessed on the instant at the meaning of the fool. Every one in the country knew that the sick were brought to Father Felix. Many and many a time Sir John had laughed at the folly. Yester-

day he would have laughed at it. But now, being in despair, he felt differently.

Within the next half-hour the whole castle was astir. All the people of the place knew that a strange thing was about to happen. Lady Archbold, docile for once, hurried on with quivering hands her most sumptuous riding-habit, and placed a hat with long feathers and jewelled buckle above her ghastly face. A litter was constructed and covered with a rich coverlet, and the insensible maiden was placed on it, supported by pillows and swathed in costly wrappings. A heap of June flowers lay on her feet. Servants in splendid liveries mounted the finest horses in the stables, and carried baskets of fruit and flowers, and vessels of silver and gold, upon their saddles. The antique jewel-hilted sword, or skein, which was the most precious heir-loom of the family, and the ancient banner with their arms, were carried conspicuously in front of the procession. Six stout retainers carried the litter on their shoulders, and the woful parents rode a little in advance on either side. A crowd of servants, labourers, tradespeople, and tenants, who poured out at short notice from the settlement of Camlough in the lap of the Golden Mountain, made a motley rear-guard to the train. Down the rugged passage of the steep mountain came winding slowly this mournful and vainglorious procession, with the glory of the midsummer morning flashing on the rich draperies of the litter, the pale adorned figure of the prostrate child, and the awed, wondering faces around her. And far on before them fled the swift-footed fool, the herald and vanguard of the train, with his arms extended as a signal of alarm, and all the fires of the sunrise burning in his eyes.

Early that morning little May had climbed the belfry to send the wishes of her heart to her sick dream-playmate. With two level hands above her eyebrows she had screamed aloud, so sharply that the crows started cawing out of the ivy.

"Aunt Martha," she cried, flying into the breakfast parlour, "there is a strange slow procession coming down the Golden Mountain."

"Guests returning," said Miss Martha, comfortably, speaking from behind the steam of her teapot.

"There are no visitors at Camlough this long, long time," said May, who was as pale as the white rose in the garden.

"That is true," said Miss Martha, doubtfully, "but what are you afraid of?"

"I fear that it may be the little girl's funeral," said May, and burst into a passion of tears.

"Impossible;" said Miss Martha; "we should have heard of her death."

"Do not cry, little one," said Father Felix. "It is no doubt an ordinary funeral from the hills." And he stole away to his chapel to pray for the rest of some unknown soul.

"Now you take the telescope, May," said her aunt, "and amuse yourself watching these travellers. And don't you fret yourself for nothing, my dear. As for me I have to boil my preserves."

Funerals were familiar events to Miss Martha.

"But there are bright things shining in the riders' hands, and a bier with a cover as white as snow," muttered May in her belfry, telescope in hand. And then about noon she beheld wild Con coming flying along the road to Monasterlea.

"News, Con? News from Camlough?" cried May, speeding to meet him, and clapping her hands to attract his notice. But he dashed past her without heeding, leaped over the gravestones like a goat, dived into the cloisters through a breach in the wall, nor paused till he burst into the chapel.

The old priest had been kneeling in prayer before his altar, but rose in dismay at the rude noise. Wild Con dropped prostrate at his feet.

"Master bring miss down hill," cried the fool. "Father Felix make her laugh and walk about. Aha! little missy get up quite well."

Father Felix patted him soothingly on the head. The idiot was quivering with excitement. He began to laugh and cry as the sound of many feet and voices became audible through the window. But the priest signed to him to be still and reverent, and he crouched upon the ground, covering his face with his hands.

The door opened again, and May came radiantly into the chapel, stepping on tiptoe, and looking like a spirit.

"Uncle," she whispered, clasping his hands, "Sir John and Lady Archbold have come all the way from Camlough with their daughter, who is sick. You will cure her, uncle? Oh, you will make her well."

The old man changed colour and trembled. "My child," he said, "you know not what you say. But I will go and learn what they ask of me."

The procession had poured itself into the graveyard. The litter had been placed upon

a fallen tombstone. The white velvet trappings swept the earth, and the flowers and baubles glowed and glittered with new lustre and colour in the brilliant air. A tawny-cheeked woman in a scarlet shawl held a canopy of white silk over the sick girl's wan face, and over the loose golden hair, which lay in a shower among the nettles. Sir John had alighted, and, with hat in hand, advanced to meet the monk. Lady Archbold sat haughtily on her horse.

"Good sir," said Sir John, "our daughter is sick. All natural aid has failed to cure her. We come to you, begging you will restore her. We have brought you gifts—the most precious things we could select on the instant—but they are a small part of what we are prepared to give you."

The old man glanced all around, for the pomp and pride of the scene troubled him. As he stood there, with the eyes of these great people upon him, he looked to worldly view a meagre figure, both as to flesh and garb, yet with a certain dignity of age and holiness which could not be questioned, still less understood. Sir John grew impatient at a moment's delay.

"Sir," he said, "we are in anguish. Is it not your calling to succour the distressed?"

"Alas, sir," said the old man, "take away your gifts. God alone can do what you desire. I can pray in your name, but He looks to the humility of your heart."

Lady Archbold now pressed forward.

"Sirrah, obey!" she cried, wildly. "You *shall* exert your power—we care not much if it be of heaven or of hell. We only want our child! Oh, me, we only want our child!" And she broke out into a wail of despair.

"Lady," said the old man, looking at her with mild pity, "you speak to me as if I were a sorcerer. I am no such thing, neither am I a saint—only the poorest of God's servants. And I hesitate, fearing no mercy will be shown which is demanded in such a spirit."

Lady Archbold's face sank beneath his glance. She flung herself from her horse, and went down on her knees till the feathers of her hat touched the earth.

"Oh," she moaned, "tell me how to feel that this be done. You shall put ashes on my head, and I will be the humblest poor woman in these mountains. I have lived without religion, but I will try to be a Christian henceforward. Only ask your God to give me back my child!"

Many women began to sob around to see the proud lady humbled thus. The old

priest himself had tears in his eyes as he answered her appeal.

"Daughter," he said, "I will do as you wish. Let us all, then, kneel, and crave this blessing."

All sank upon their knees in the grass. Some supported themselves against the broken crosses, some leaned upon the mounds of the graves. Many women were weeping, many men trembling. Lady Archbold crouched with her face to the very moss of the earth. It was long, whispered the people, since she had knelt before. She shuddered as the priest made a loud distinct prayer, to which the mass of the people responded with a sound that was like the roaring of a troubled sea.

But soon there was silence in the graveyard. The priest had sunk prostrate in silent prayer. The very rooks had stopped their clamour in the belfry. The people held their breath, and feared even to sway their bent bodies. Only a lark dared to sing, and sang long and ecstatically, rising higher and higher, till, only for the echo of its notes, it might have seemed to be consumed in the amber fires of the sun. It seemed to May that the singing of this lark was the voice of the old man's prayer, as it pierced its urgent way to heaven.

An hour passed, and the kneeling people began to grow weary. Lady Archbold glanced once at her child, crouched to the earth again, and groaned aloud. Another hour passed, and a woman fainted, and some children stole away to play at a distance. It was far in the third hour when a loud scream rang out upon the air.

The scream came from May, who was close to the sick girl, and had seen her long hair stir among the nettles. The next moment Katherine Archbold sat up, and began gazing curiously around her. First a hoarse murmur of awe ran through the crowd; then there arose such a cheer from the hearts of the mountain men as had never been heard among these walls before. The startled crows set up a wild clamour round the belfry. The mother rushed towards her daughter, stumbled among the people and fell, but was raised by the strong, kind arms of women, and carried by them to the side of her Katherine. Mother, father, and child were locked in a wild embrace, amidst the sobs and exclamations of the people.

It was some minutes before any one remembered the old priest. Little May's shrill voice again raised, and her slight arm beating back the people, first recalled him to their minds. Then they looked on the ground where he lay upon his face. They

turned him on his back, and found he had passed from prayer into a swoon. Now Miss Martha bustled up in tears. She had knelt in the distance upon her door-step, half joining in the scene and half resenting it, knowing too well the consequences of such efforts for her brother. She gathered his frail body in her arms, and, with the help of friends, had him carried to the house.

"Ah, yes, good sir," she said, bitterly, to Sir John, "he has given your daughter health, but I greatly fear she has given him his death."

"I pray God no," said Sir John.

Miss Martha was too hospitable to suffer the people from Camlough to return without refreshment, and bestowed on them such entertainment as it was in her power to give. The crowd soon scattered to carry far and wide the story of the morning, and Sir John and his wife and child honoured Miss Martha's dwelling with their presence.

May invited Katherine to her own little room, having leave to wait upon her, whilst Miss Martha was attending to Lady Archbold. To this Katherine submitted with a languid condescension.

"Have you not a better frock than this?" asks she, surveying the robe of thick white muslin in which May was attiring her with tender hands.

"Alas, no!" said May, crest-fallen, "I always thought it was a pretty frock, but I see it is not good enough for you."

"I should think not," said Katherine, finging her head about, and tossing her gold mane in May's eyes. "You should see what handsome frocks I wear at Camlough; but what makes your eyes so red, little girl?"

"I wept this morning," said May, who was ready to weep again. "I wept because you were so sick."

"How funny!" said Katherine, laughing; "I'm sure I should not weep if you were sick. But I like you very well, and you shall come to Camlough. You are a nice little girl in your own way; but you are not so beautiful as I am."

"Oh, no!" said May, eagerly, "I could not be so silly as to think so."

"You are a *very* pleasant little girl," said Katherine; "I shall certainly have you with me at Camlough."

Before Sir John and Lady Archbold left Monasterlea, they stood by the old priest's bedside, to offer him their thanks. At her husband's suggestion, Lady Archbold expressed her sorrow for wild words which had been uttered in her grief.

The old man was ill, and could not speak much. "Forget all that," he said, "but there is one thing I would bid you remember. Guard well this soul that God has given back into your keeping. See that in gaining her you have not lost her. Make her modest and holy, gentle and wise."

But Lady Archbold's pride was on the return. She thought herself lectured, and turned away with impatience, which she hardly took the trouble to conceal. At the same moment Katherine was led unwillingly into the room, glancing about the place with an air of scorn. The pallid old man upon the couch was an object of ridicule in her eyes. When her father placed her beneath the hand which was extended to bless her, she drew back in disgust. And then they all departed, and the train went back to Camlough.

And May hid herself in her belfry to weep. This was her first real grief. Katherine had disappointed her. The sweet dream-playmate was no more. Pride shown to herself she did not mind, but contempt of her uncle the loving heart could not brook.

And after all this Miss Martha's anxious words came true; for in two days Father Felix was dead.

CHAPTER V. THE HEIR TO THE WOODS.

PAUL FINISTON and his mother had for many years lived in a high narrow house, on the Quays, in Dublin, close by where a light bridge springs over the dark running river. Tall spars congregated beside it, and old brown sails flapped heavily in the water, turning orange and red in the sun. High above there were domes against the sky, and in the shadow of the up-hill distance loomed the ghostly outlines of many peaks and pinnacles.

Mrs. Finiston was a frail creature, who was chained to a sofa in her dingy room. For years she had had nothing strong to protect her but her trust in God, nothing bright to look at but the face of her boy. Yet with these two comforts she had managed to get on pretty well, and now her son was turning into a tall brave lad. Only let her live for a few years more and she might free him for ever from the dangers that beset him.

She had saved her husband from the curse of his family, and she would also try to save her son. Her husband had been the brother of Simon the miser. He had obtained with difficulty a commission in the army, and had been sent into the world to seek his fortune. It had been her labour

to keep him from longing after ill-omened possessions. She was tender, upright, and somewhat superstitious, and the curse of Tobereevil had been the terror of her life. The dread of it had made her patient in poverty, and peculiarly unselfish in her love; and her patience and love had so influenced her husband that he had never shown a desire to touch the rusting treasures of his race. Husband and wife had paid one visit together to Tobereevil, and had hastened away, shuddering at the wretchedness they had witnessed. But now he had been dead many years.

Mrs. Finiston was in receipt of a small pension, and possessed also a trifling annuity of her own. But all this little income would vanish when she died. No wonder, then, that she prayed to be spared. No wonder that she stinted and saved with the hope of being enabled to give her son a profession. She had determined against making him a soldier. As a soldier he would be always poor; and in poverty, there was that danger of the longing for the riches of the misers of Tobereevil. She would hedge round his future from that risk.

Her high sitting-room window was bowed out towards the river, and the narrow panes between its ancient pilasters afforded a view over the bridge into the sunshine. The dome of the Four Courts shone finely in the distance above the masts, through the soft amber haze of a summer's day. She had resolved that under its shelter her Paul should yet win fame and gold: honourable fame, which he would prefer to wealth, gold, honestly earned, which he would generously share and spend. There were many great men even in her own little day who had grown up out of smaller beginnings. The mother on the sofa recalled a dozen such.

With a view to all this she had deprived herself of comfort that he might be taught by the best tutors in Dublin. He was now seventeen, a student of Trinity, and had taken a fair share of honours for his time. He was not a genius, nor over-fond of books, but he loved his mother, and appreciated the sacrifices she was making for his sake. And, though he smiled a little at her anxiety about the curse, his horror of it was even greater than her own.

Thus Paul Finiston, sitting among his books in the rude old window, would often also raise his eyes and hopes to that dome of promise against the clouds. He would stifle in his heart certain yearnings for an open-air life; for travel, for change, for the ownership of country acres, and the

power of mastership in a dominion of his own. He would determine within him to let no weakness of purpose throw him in the way of temptation. He would become a learned hard-headed man of business, who should found a new house to redeem the honour of his name; and above all should have no leisure for bad dreams.

"Paul," said his mother one evening as he came in and settled down to his books, "I have had a letter from the west."

"From the west!" echoed Paul, startled, thinking of the miser.

"From dear old Martha Mourne. She is coming to Dublin on business with her lawyer. And she says, 'I will bring poor Timothy's child to see you.'"

"Who is poor Timothy's child?" asked Paul. "Her niece? I hope she is not grown up." For he was very shy of women, having been accustomed to speak to none but his mother.

"She is a child of about twelve years old, if I remember. And you must be kind to her, Paul. You must meet them at the coach and bring them here."

Paul pulled a face over his book, a sign of dismay which he would not have shown his mother for the world. He tried to be glad that she should see a friend, but for himself he had a dread of old women and children. Still he would be kind to them and civil to them, if he could. He would meet them at the coach-office, of course, and carry all their hand-boxes, if need be. He would pour out the tea as he was accustomed to do, and help little missy and old madam to cake. But after all these things were resolved upon, it could surely never hurt any one that he should kick his old boots about his own little room, and wish the good people safely back where they came from.

At four o'clock next day the coach came in. It was a long, rose-coloured evening towards the spring, full of soft promise of sweet months yet to come; bars of red fell across the bridge, and spikes of burnished gold tipped the clustering spars, while masses of light and shade rolled up and down the shifting shrouds, gambolling like living things.

Paul had laid the cloth, and brought the fat roast chicken and the slices of cold ham from the nearest cook's shop; had set forth the fresh lemon-cakes and the strawberry preserves. The tea was in the teapot and the kettle on the hob. He had placed the muffins at a prudent distance from the fire, where his mother on her sofa could turn them at her leisure; and, all these formid-

able arrangements made, he sauntered slowly down the quay with his hands in his pockets. He gazed with new interest at the movements of the men in the boats. He spoke to them from the wall, and was pleased when they invited him on board; but the very last moment of lingering arrived, and Paul was at his post when the coach drove up.

He scanned the faces inside, and recognised his charge with a thrill of relief. They did not appear awful after all, and they looked very tired, and very glad of him at the door. This no doubt made Paul look also glad to see them, and the introduction was quite pleasant and friendly. There was nothing to object to about Miss Martha, except that her bonnet was a little bruised on one side; but that was from falling asleep against the side of the coach. She looked thoroughly a lady in her neat garments of lavender and black, and her quick-witted ways seemed to announce that she was accustomed to be no inconvenience to any one. Beside her sat a slim little maiden, in a grey pelisse and a deep straw bonnet tied down with white, who was cherishing fondly a basket of roses, which had faded, in her lap. And, when the bonnet turned round, there were discovered under it cheeks flushed with fatigue, and bright eager eyes; a sweet little bloomy carnation of a face.

The travellers, upon their part, saw a strong, graceful, good-looking lad. The face was as good a face as ever woman looked upon. The features were manly, the eyes dark and steady under finely marked brows. They were sweet-tempered eyes, yet suggestive of passion. The forehead was broad; and the temples too full for any man, but a poet. The half-curved locks were thick and fair, and the mouth looked particularly truthful. It was not a very firm mouth, and yet not weak. Truthful-looking and changeable, and very apt to smile. And it smiled broadly as Paul Finiston handed young missy and old madam out of the coach.

As for parcels, Miss Martha had only two small bags and a large umbrella, and it was as much as Paul could do to get leave to carry the latter.

"No, my dear," she said, "though I like you for offering. It is a good sign to see a lad polite to old women. But I'd rather you'd take hands with little May to keep her steady on the crossings."

So Paul marched forward with May under one arm and the umbrella under the other, and Miss Martha followed with a

bag in each hand. And, in spite of his dread of old women and children, Paul forgot to be uneasy lest any of the Trinity fellows should happen to stroll down the street at the wrong minute, and behold this procession crossing the bridge.

THE WHITE WITCH OF COMBE ANDREW.

"I'LL just go and see my Aunt Hagley: see if I don't!"

It was Mary Bernal who spoke, and it was Jane Dalby to whom she spoke; and what she said she said with an air, as if more was lying behind than the mere words would show.

Jane Dalby tossed her head. "Go, and welcome!" she answered disdainfully. "For my part," she continued, "I wouldn't own as glib as you to an aunt like that old Hagley. She's none such a dear to be so proud of!"

"All very well, Jane, for you to cast stones at aunt," said Mary with a superior manner. "Me and them as knows——" Here she stopped.

"Now then, go on, can't you?" cried Jane. "Out with it. You and them as knows what?"

"Well! we knows what we knows," said Mary, after a pause. "And now you're answered, Jane."

With which she left the servants' hall triumphantly, as one who has at least given the enemy a check, if nothing worse; going up-stairs to adorn her young mistress, Belle Loder; for it was dressing time; while Jane went to do the like office for her young lady, Rose Kenealy; both maids having the same object at heart for each—the fascination of Major Julius Crewkherne, owner of Crewkherne Manor hard by, and the handsomest man in Devonshire, as he was one of the best matches.

Now Crewkherne Manor and the Loder property lay handy to each other; and it had always been one of the favourite wishes of both houses, that the Crewkherne boy and the Loder girl would take a fancy to each other when they grew up, and so enclose the two estates in a ring fence that would suit every one concerned. Each property alone was well enough; but, both together, they would place the possessor among the best of the county, and would raise the joint families of Loder-Crewkherne to a position second to none in England. Wherefore it was, that when old Darcy Crewkherne died and his son the major came

home from India to reign in his stead, every one said it was a thing so plainly marked out by Providence—and the local map—that the major couldn't but see it, and do as his father had wished him to do; namely, take Miss Belle, and in time the Loder property, so soon as the days of mourning were at an end.

And perhaps things would have gone their way if the Loders could have managed to keep the major close, and not have let any one else have a chance. For he was fairly enough inclined to Miss Belle, when he first returned, and showed his liking frankly. But in an evil hour for her he accepted an invitation to stay a few days at Martin's Tor, the Rawdons' place; and there he found Rose Kenealy, Mrs. Rawdon's orphaned, penniless niece, whom they had adopted and brought up, and who was "out" for her first year.

To be sure the Rawdons, mindful of the common talk, had been careful to ask Belle Loder at the same time as the major; while, to do them justice, no thought of little Rose, or her possible attractions, had entered into their calculations. She was but a child yet to them; and they did not think of her marrying, any more than if she had been but ten years old instead of eighteen. They had known well and liked heartily old Darcy Crewkherne, and they had liked Julius too, when a boy; and they wished to be neighbourly, that was all. And as Julius was anxious to both make new and re-establish old relations, he had gone to Martin's Tor willingly; and when he had seen little Rose he had remained more willingly. It was a case of love at first sight; and the major was a man of a clear mind and determined will.

There could not be a more striking contrast between two girls than there was between Belle Loder and Rose Kenealy; and the contrast was not only on the outside. Belle was a tall, largely made, sleepy-looking girl with a dead white skin, a profusion of straight and silky flaxen hair, and heavy-lidded eyes of light hazel, with singularly large pupils. But you did not often see her eyes, for she had a trick of keeping them half closed; and only when she wished to produce an effect did she open them fully. Rose, on the contrary, was a small, slight, vivacious creature, with a curly head of brightest brown, rose-red cheeks, and large dark eyes that changed with the light, being sometimes blue and sometimes grey, but always bright and frank, and tender or merry as the humour took her. They were true Irish eyes, in-

herited from her father, and were as eloquent as other people's words. And the first sight of them bewitched Julius Crewkherne.

That was the very phrase they had used in the kitchen, when discussing the bearing of the major towards the two young ladies. Miss Belle, she was the one as ought to be, but Miss Rose, she had bewitched him. And the word was not used without meaning; for the Devonshire folk believe in witches to this day; witches both white and black; witches who cast a spell and witches who take it off again; witches that do harm and they that do good. Wherein was the sting of Mary Bernal's words, which Jane Dalby had understood well enough; for Aunt Hagley, down at Combe Andrew, was a white witch of power, and renowned as such through all the country side.

Long before the dinner-bell rang and the rest of the guests had assembled, Major Julius Crewkherne lounged into the drawing-room; and almost immediately after came Rose Kenealy.

As Rose came in, fresh and simple as usual, her dark-brown curly hair caught back by a broad blue ribbon, and her white dress looped here and there with blue, her small waist trimly belted, yet leaving her free and elastic, the major thought her the loveliest little rosebud of a girl he had ever seen; and with a nature as sweet and pure as her face. That frank look of hers was enough for him. Rose blushed to the very roots of her hair when she saw who was standing there in the bay window alone; but she looked only prettier for blushing; and as she did not attempt to run away, the major liked her all the better for her girlish embarrassment.

He came out from the bay of the window, and met her midway. It was a rare chance to see her alone; and he had made up his mind to profit by the first that offered.

"What pretty flowers!" he said, pointing to the flowers in her waistband. They were only a few sprays of jessamine, but he spoke as if they were something quite rare.

"I am so fond of jessamine," said Rose, simply.

"So am I," returned the major. "Will you give me one for my coat?"

"If you like," said Rose.

"And fasten it in for me?"

This was coming to rather close quarters; and Rose was not used to gentlemen's coats. Hesitating then a little, and blushing a

good deal, only complying because to refuse would be even more awkward, the girl, hanging down her head and trembling all over, came quite close to the major, and taking a spray from her waist, tried to fasten it into his coat. But her fingers were marvellously slow and heavy, and she bungled over her simple task in an unaccountable way. She felt as if she were going to faint, to die, to laugh aloud, or burst into tears; she did not indeed know how or what she felt; and it did not help her when the major, suddenly taking that little quivering hand in his, kissed it tenderly, saying in a soft whisper as he held it up to his cheek:

"May I ask your uncle to give me this, Rose? Will you give it me yourself?"

The girl made no answer. She only drooped her pretty head still lower, while her blushes faded into absolute paleness, and her slight figure trembled more.

"Do you love me, Rose?" the major went on to say. "Do you love me well enough to like to stay with me for ever, and marry me, and be my little wife? Will you not speak to me, my darling?"

"Yes, I do love you," said Rose, in a low voice.

And then the major took her in his arms, and lifted her fairly off her feet, as he kissed her silently, his heart, as hers, too full for words. And when he set her down again she fled, frightened, happy, confused, in such trouble of joy as to be almost pain, till she found herself in faithful Jane's sympathetic arms.

This day at dinner no one knew what ailed Rose that she looked so shy, and yet so happy; or what had come into her face to render her so beautiful. Only the major knew, and only Miss Loder guessed.

So now the thing was done; and Major Julius Crewkherne, the great match of the country, had committed himself to Miss Rose Kenealy, a girl without a penny, just a pretty little maid with bright eyes, rose-red cheeks, a frank smile, and a true heart. While here was his naturally appointed bride, Miss Belle, who had everything in her favour, shunted to the side, passed over, as we might say jilted.

When Belle Loder heard the news, not the keenest observer could have said that she suffered, or indeed have told that she felt at all. It was Mrs. Rawdon herself who told her, quite apologetically, and with many-repeated assurances that she had been as much taken by surprise as any one could be. She had never thought of such a thing! Rose, of all persons in

the world, little more than a mere child yet, only just out of the nursery!

On which Miss Loder, who until now had been sitting, as if carved in alabaster, counting her fan-sticks, suddenly lifted up her eyes and looked Mrs. Rawdon full in the face. And her look was so sudden, so fierce, so direct, her eyes were so large, the pupils so dilated, the look so fixed, that poor Mrs. Rawdon turned quite pale, and looked as if she were going to faint. Then Belle dropped her broad white lids again, took once more to counting her fan-sticks, and drawled out, in a low and level voice:

"Yes, just so; but, you see, at eighteen it is rather late to consider a girl as a child, and Major Crewkherne is a good match where there is no fortune."

Which last observation affronted Mrs. Rawdon, and destroyed all her sympathy for Miss Loder's disappointment.

If riches give social influence, knowledge gives moral power; and not Mr. Darcy Crewkherne himself, when he was alive—and he had been the king of those parts, so to speak—had the hold on the people that Dame Hagley had, Mary Bernal's aunt. To the outer eye she was just a tall, dark-browed, powerful, and still handsome woman, of about sixty, living in a solitary mud hovel set in the heart of a wild and desolate combe or valley, where nothing grew on the hill-sides save gorse and bracken and heather, and where even sheep could find no pasturage; but to the eye of faith she was greater than the greatest, holding the power of the viewless ones of the air in her hand, and holding with these the keys of life and death. Yet if spirits thronged to do her bidding, they were spirits of less malevolence, if of greater power, than those which obey the black witch. It was the black witch who banned, and Dame Hagley who removed the ban at the grievous cost and suffering of the former. And it was well known that not the wickedest old witch or wizard of them all but trembled before her, and had cause to repent her evil deeds if Dame Hagley took her in hand.

"That cursed little girl has bewitched the major, and my aunt shall know the rights of it," said Mary Bernal to herself, when she heard the news; it was Miss Belle herself who told her. "I'll go over to Combe Andrew to-morrow."

It was a hot and fiery sunset when Mary, getting leave for the evening, set out to her aunt's. It was a brave thing of her to do, for the way was lonely, and not only the valley had a bad name, but many a place

by which she had to pass. Years ago there had been a murder on the cliffs, and the body had been buried in the very hovel where Dame Hagley lived; then a child had been found cast like a dead sheep in a deserted quarry; and a man had committed suicide at the entrance of the combe. So that, on the whole, it was an awful district all round, and one cause of Dame Hagley's influence was that she dared to live where others dared hardly pass. But her very living there added to the general terrors of the place.

People wondered when they saw Mary setting her face towards the cliff path; but Mary shared some of her aunt's courage. She "favoured" her in appearance, and it was not thought unlikely by more than one that she might follow in her steps, and take up the trade when the other let it fall. Still, for all that, it was a bold thing for a young woman of thirty to go along that lonely cliff in the evening, with the sun setting so fiery red, and the black loneliness, the haunted depths of Combe Andrew to follow. But Mary had become interested in this matter of the major and Miss Belle, and it was not a little that would have turned her back.

About an hour's hard walking brought her to the point where, deep in the darkness below, she saw a faint glimmer which told her that her aunt was at home. It was almost dark by now, but Mary knew the way, and skirted its dangers dexterously. She was quite free and undaunted, and did not even start when once a straying sheep came full butt against her, and once she nearly fell over the dead carcass of another. Presently she came down the hill, and along the narrow winding way that led to the hovel.

Her aunt heard her step, and came out to the door.

"I knew you were a-coming," she said, quietly; "and I've made your tea."

"That's good," said Mary. "It's a rough road."

The two women were strangely undemonstrative in manner to each other. There were no feminine effusions, no endearments, such as most women of all classes indulge in, but they met and spoke together like two men. And, indeed, handsome and bold and strong as they were, they were not unlike beardless men, and they were like each other. The same low, broad brow, the same firm eyebrows, the same dark and steady eyes, the same fleshy lips tightly shut, so cruel in repose, so sweet when smiling, and the

same commanding height. They were as much alike as though they were mother and daughter; and they were equally formidable.

"So you knew I was a-coming?" said Mary, after a long silence, during which she had drunk her tea and eaten her cake with a relish.

"Yes; They told me."

"Maybe They told you why, then?" said Mary, looking into her aunt's face with simple faith.

The older woman nodded. "Yes; They told me that too," she answered, watching her niece.

"And can you do it, aunt? Can you take off the spell?" said Mary, earnestly.

"I never knew of one I couldn't," said Dame Hagley.

"And it is a spell, aunt, ain't it now? She has bewitched him?"

"No fear," answered her aunt.

"What else can it be?" cried Mary.

"What else, indeed!" echoed her aunt.

"There's Miss Belle, made for him, as one may say, brought up together a'most, and with a fine fortune when her father goes. And her father and his too, that wished it so. And here comes this sly little Rose Kenealy, a mere beggar to Miss Belle, and not half so pretty. And there's the major, clean mad about her, and gone and asked her. It can't be right; it must be a spell!"

"It ain't aught else," said Dame Hagley, taking up the clue she had been waiting for.

"It is a spell, Mary, and the major is bewitched. Can't you bring Miss Belle here, and I'll let her see the face as has done it?"

Mary shook her head. "It's too rough a road, aunt, and Miss Belle's not over fain to walk."

"You want me, though, to work it?" said Aunt Hagley, coming to business.

"Yes; give me something as'll take it off, aunt. See, I've brought you Miss Belle's hair, and some of that Rose's, and there are nails of both of 'em, and the major's too. I tell you I was clever to get all these, and it's cost me a deal of trouble. But I did it. I don't like to see right wronged, and I did it."

"I'll see to it," said Aunt Hagley gravely. "I dare say you've brought enow. I'll work the spell and then I'll let you know."

On which, with a pack of greasy cards, some spirits of wine, a handful of salt, a pinch of benzoin, and another of lycopodium, the White Witch went through a series of mutterings and strange gestures;

all of which Mary watched with a steady pulse, though expecting to see in bodily shape one of those great spirits who were, she believed, about her aunt at this moment, doing her service and imparting to her knowledge.

After awhile Aunt Hagley lifted up her head from the saucepan which, alternately with the cards, she had been peering into, and sighed deeply, wiping her face wearily, as she sank back in her high chair, as one exhausted.

"It has been a sore time, Mary," she said; "but I've got the word and the sign at last. Rose Kenealy: there it was written fair enough; she it is as has laid the spell on the major, and you, my girl, can take it off. What would Miss Belle give you, Mary, if you could get her the major?" she asked, suddenly.

"Give! she'd give her ears," said Mary.

"I don't see as how you could do much with them," Aunt Hagley replied gravely. "To put 'em into a stocking would scarcely grow guineas, my girl! No; I mean what would she give in money? hard money—money down, Mary?"

"Lord, aunt, I don't know," said Mary, shocked. It was one thing to do good for loyalty and love, and another to work evil for money. But Aunt Hagley had long ago reduced all life to the filling of her money-stocking, and the only thing she despised in her niece was the indifference she showed, as yet, to money. But she would improve, she used to say to herself; she had good blood, and she would improve.

"It can't be done for nothing, Mary," she said gravely. "If Miss Belle will make it worth my while and yours—and yours too, my girl; I'm not selfish, and I will work for you as well as myself—but if she'll do well by us I'll do well by her; and Miss Rose shall trouble her no more. I'll take the spell off, no fear, but it's worth money, Mary; why, it's worth hundreds of pounds to her, and you'll be a fool not to make a good bargain for yourself now you've got the power."

"I can't ask for money, aunt, for what I do for right's sake," said Mary sullenly.

Her aunt had been all this time putting some powder into a packet.

"All right, my girl; then you'll not have the spell, and Miss Rose will have the major," and she put back on the shelf the small locked box from which she had taken the powder.

As usual, that stronger will had its way, and the weaker yielded. After a faint

resistance, it ended by Mary putting on her bonnet again, and carefully placing in her purse a small packet of white powder, which Miss Belle was to put into Miss Rose's coffee—nothing but coffee would do, said Aunt Hagley—when Miss Rose would suffer as she ought, perhaps fly up the chimney as a bat, or they would see the devil run out of her mouth as an eft or a toad, or something such like would happen to her, and the major would be restored to his senses. And then, being in a good humour—for Mary had promised to ask for handsome gains, and to give her half—Aunt Hagley, without putting on her bonnet, took the road with her niece, laughing a little grimly as she said, "You see, my dear, I ain't no reason to be afraid. I shan't meet much that's uglier than myself."

Would Miss Belle do it? That was now Mary's difficulty. "You see gentlefolks are not like us," she argued. "They won't believe, and they say they know; but it's we as knows, not they. Would Miss Belle believe if I stood her out till Doomsday, and told her what aunt had said? Not a bit of it. But how could aunt have known that I was coming, or about the major and that Rose, unless They had told her? And as for this spell that is to break a spell, would Miss Belle do it, however much she was told?" However, it had to be tried. There was too much at stake for her not to venture.

Mary approached the subject cautiously. Miss Belle was not one who ever made free with servants, and even Mary, who had been with her for years, had to be careful. She was prepared to be laughed at, of course, and Belle did laugh at her, and she let her. She wouldn't join in the laughter, for They were about her, and They knew that she knew them; but Miss Belle was different. And after she had let her laugh she brought her round, bit by bit, to consent to work her charm.

"You see, miss, if there's nothing in it, it can't do no harm; but if there is, as aunt says, Lord, miss! wouldn't it be fun to see a toad run out of Miss Rose's mouth, or a hump grow on her back before your eyes, and she stand there, just a witch, and all the world to see it? If the major is bewitched, why miss, as an old friend and neighbour, you ought to help him to his senses again. It isn't likely that aunt and so many of us think things as isn't. We know it can be done, and we know it can be taken off again. And there's no one like Aunt Hagley for taking off."

All this Mary said in a headlong, dashing, earnest way, while dressing Miss Loder's hair for dinner, the day after her evening expedition to Combe Andrew.

"Very well, you silly girl, I will do it to satisfy you, and show you how absurd you are in your superstitions. I will give Miss Kenealy the charm as you call it, and you will see nothing will come of it. There, give it to me. What is it?"

"This in coffee, miss," half whispered Mary. "Only in coffee, miss; else the charm won't work!"

Belle was sitting before the glass, and the eyes of mistress and maid met in the mirror. The one was flushed, eager, coarse in her zeal, but honest and single-hearted; the other pale, languid, reticent, seeing farther and thinking deeper, and accepting the responsibility of a possible evil, as far as the poles removed from the intentions of the simpler sinner. The one meant an honest counter-charm—witchcraft foiled with its own weapons; the other meant—what? She took the packet and laughed.

"The idea of witchcraft in these days! How absurd!" she said.

"Try it, miss, and then maybe you'll not say that!" said Mary earnestly; and in her endeavour to persuade her to the trial, she forgot all about the bargain she was to have made, and the sum she was to have demanded.

Dinner was over, and the coffee was brought up. All during the meal Belle Loder had been supremely sweet and friendly with both the major and little Rose. The major, whose conscience had its sore points, was quite grateful to her; and Belle thought in her own mind, and wondered if—Rose being out of the way—well, if—

Coffee was handed round.

"Shall I make yours, dear?" said Belle graciously to Rose; and as she ladled out the crushed candy something more than crushed candy fell from her dainty fingers.

"Oh, thank you!" said little Rose, flushing, in her turn pleased and grateful, too, at this thawing of the Loder ice.

She took the cup and laughed pleasantly; and Belle looked at her sleepily through her half-closed lids. Out in the garden, peering from under the blind, another pair of eyes watched her curiously. They were those of the White Witch come to witness the result of her charm; and to claim its price. Not a leaf stirred, not a creature cried; Rose raised the cup to her lips.

"Rosy, give me a footstool, my dear," said Mrs. Rawdon, lazily.

And Rose set down her cup untasted, and took her aunt the hassock. Then she sat down on the sofa, and, nestling close to her, talked in a low voice, forgetting her coffee.

"The fool, why don't she take it!" muttered the woman watching her. "Who ever saw the like of such foolishness—to have it and not to take it!"

The major was at the piano, turning over some songs.

"Belle, do you sing this?" he asked. And Belle, putting down her cup untasted, as Rose had done, went over to him, and discussed the music. Then they both came back to the table.

"Why, your coffee must be cold," said the major; and he looked into Belle's face, smiling that ineffable smile of his that had more witchcraft in it than all Dame Hagley knew. Belle looked back at him, with her large eyes fully opened; and by that look lost the thread. He had the cups in his hands, unsuspecting, unconscious; and he gave one to each girl. At that moment the dog made a bound through the window, growling savagely, and the woman who had kept the thread slunk away among the bushes.

The next morning a great terror fell on the house: Miss Belle Loder was found stiff and stark in her room. She went to bed with the rest apparently in good health, but she must have died about midnight, said the medical men who made the post-mortem examination: three hours after the butler had taken away the empty coffee-cups. Yet, though she had died with all the symptoms of blood poisoning, no trace of poison could be found by any test known to the experts. It was a mystery, they all said, and a mystery it remained. Wherefore, "Died by the visitation of God," said the jury. "Died because you didn't work the spell as it should be worked, and get the money They had bespoke," said Dame Hagley fiercely to her niece. And "Poisoned herself for love and disappointment," went the verdict of the world, repeated by the major's uneasy conscience; but no one added, "Fallen into the pit digged for another;" while only Mary Bernal suspected, and only Dame Hagley knew.

Whatever the dame knew, it did not trouble her long; for not more than a week after Miss Loder was buried, a man going to the hovel in Combe Andrew found Dame Hagley and her miserable home a mere heap of blackened ashes. She had been burned to death in a drunken sleep, with

none to give her aid or warning, none even to know of her danger or to pity her destruction. The ruined hut was never touched. No one owned the place, and not even the poorest squatter cared to build on so unlikely and evilly renowned a spot: so no one dug deep enough among the charred ashes to find the mass of gold which the White Witch had hidden away in her stocking, and which she kept buried under the floor of her hut. And there it is still for any brave adventurer who cares to seek it.

BAFFLED.

I WILL plant a tree for myself, she said,
With clusters of crimson bloom,

Whose beauty shall dazzle the waking sight,
Whose scent shall fill all the dreamy night
With the breath of its sweet perfume.
But the blight fell down with the morning dew,
And the rose-tree died ere its first bud blew.

I will twine a wreath for myself, she said,
Of myrtle, and laurel, and bay,
Whose glory shall halo my living head,
And over the grave where they lay me dead,
Speak of me and my fame away.
But the canker was deep, and the thorn was keen,
And the bright leaves withered her clasp between.

I will carve my dream for myself, she said,
Its loveliness fixed for ever,
A thing of beauty and joy and life;
We will pass serene through the world's hot strife,
I and my work together.
But death's strong hand struck sudden and cold,
The chisel dropped from her fainting hold.

They tossed them aside in a useless heap,
Dead root and blossoms, and half-wrought stone,
Where the river of time flowed swift and deep,
And they left not a trace thereon!

THE BLUEBOTTLE FLY.

A FRENCH ART-STUDENT'S STORY.

IN FOUR CHAPTERS. CHAPTER II.

THE change of position, the slight excitement of the adventure, had aroused me from my torpor, and all my spirit was renewed in the interest furnished by the accident. I hoped to find amusement in the recital of the circumstances by my fellow-traveller. But I soon found that I must resign all hope of conversation with him. He was bent on silence, and answered all my eager questioning in short and almost sulky monosyllables.

"How did the disaster happen?"

"Thrown into a ditch."

"What caused it?"

"A cursed fly!"

"The horse stung?"

"Kicked and reared like the devil!"

"Were you ever on this road before?"

"No!"

"Shall you go back to Paris this same way?"

"He must surely have been drinking," thought I, for he answered this question not in words but with a short hysterical laugh, and a shiver which ran through his whole frame; then after staring at me for a moment he sank back heavily, and closed his eyes, evidently wishing to be troubled with no more questions. He was scarcely older than myself. A mere youth in years, and yet the lines about his face and the furrows on his forehead told of dissipation and late hours, and the indulgence of evil passions, while his long damp hair, falling in heavy masses around his face, cast a grey shadow over his brow, which made it look more pallid still. There was great interest to me in this young and careworn face. "What a fit companion, or rather contrast, would he make to my poitrine!" thought I. "Both are dying of consumption, but while the girl is fading sweetly and tenderly like a withered flower, the boy is mouldering away with the corruption of the grave already full upon him."

Silent and motionless as he reclined, he was evidently under the influence of some strong emotion. His arms were crossed upon his breast, but I perceived that his fingers had clutched the folds of his coat with such nervous grip that the cloth was indented with the pressure of his nails. Sometimes he would open his eyes as if by stealth, and on finding my own gaze riveted on him would close them again hastily, as if afraid of being led into conversation, or of having to bear more questioning on my part. Sometimes again he would turn restlessly on his seat, and then I observed that his eyelids would quiver for a moment, and their long auburn lashes become moistened as if with tears. There was a singular fascination in the whole aspect of the young man. I could not resist the temptation to watch him with the greatest interest. Unlike his companion, he was evidently a gentleman, his countenance was delicate and aristocratic in the extreme, his hands soft and white as those of a woman.

As I watched my companion, my attention was suddenly drawn to what at first appeared a large black spot upon the snowy bosom of his shirt. I stared at it in a kind of dreamy amazement, born of the *petit bleu* administered by Père Ajax, then began to wonder what on earth it could possibly be, and last of all to marvel, always dreamily, and staringly, and stupidly, why I had not perceived it before. There seemed a magic fascination in this same black spot, for I could not withdraw my gaze from the

one peculiar plait in the shirt where it lay; and I was just closing my eyes in a sort of drowsy fatigue, when I started convulsively, for the black spot suddenly began to move, and crawling lazily along the embroidery was slowly progressing upwards. It was nothing but a large blue-bottle fly, one of the heavy, swollen, unwieldy kind belonging to the butchers' shambles; so dreaded of drovers and agriculturists; so hated in the markets; so nauseous and detestable, that a cruel superstition is attached to the influence of its approach, for it is believed by the people to possess the keen instinct of the vulture and the wolf, in the track of blood, and to follow with the same tenacity the scent of approaching death. Whence the creature came or how it alighted there I could not tell, but there it was, wending its way slowly and heavily upwards towards the young man's face! My whole attention became absorbed in its movements. The mouth of the sleeper was still open, his breathing still short and laboured. Will the foul insect ascend to his lips? Yes, there it is crawling along the sharp edge of the embroidery! No, with a sudden leap and a short and angry buzz it has descended again, and creeps along the heavy gold chain which crosses the waistcoat, balancing its bloated carcass with its slightly extended wings as neatly as any rope-dancer with his balance-pole! Anon, the creature with a sudden spring and with a burst of sound so loud as to seem perfectly inconsistent with its size, has reached the collar. The young man is still heedless, his eyes are still closed, and his mouth still open, for his jaw has gradually drooped, and bestows a yet more ghastly expression on his countenance. The puny insect, now grown a monster in my sight, is actually creating such a painful apprehension in my mind that I can no longer sit still.

The short dry breath, issuing with painful effort from the slumberer's lips, agitates the wings, and yet the creature moves not, neither does the youth arouse himself, or brush the noxious visitor away. There is no one gifted with the artist's temperament, the irritable nerves, the vivid imagination, who will not understand the excitement under which I laboured, as I beheld the gradual progress of the enemy towards the open mouth of the seemingly inanimate figure before me. Slowly, slowly, dragging its slimy weight along, over the damp meshes of his hair, did it finally stand fixed upon the blonde moustache, and, as it remained there motionless, my

whole frame shook with the nervous terror which seized upon me lest—— But no, the idea was too horrible; and yet imagination would revert to the old German legend of the Linden Tree, and as I stared at the creature standing there, my lips moved as I murmured forth the lines that had made such impression on me when a boy. I had not remembered them for years, but suddenly they rushed to my memory, as though I had but just that moment heard them crooned forth, as in days of old, by the old German Frau who had nursed me in my childhood:

And the knight lay under the linden-tree,
Despite of his wound still fair to see.
But a great black-beetle sate on his chin,
Watching his mouth that he might crawl in!
Tranquil and mute like the beggar that waits
For his dole of bread at the convent gates;
Counting the minutes, and cursing the time
(For the wicket is closed until noonday chime);
Thus the beetle abides on the dead man's chin,
Till his jaw shall drop, and then he'll crawl in!

And then as I closed my eyelids tight, and pressed my hands one over the other in such violent grasp that my nails almost entered the flesh, this horrid image likewise died away, and another one, still more horrible, arose in its stead, and I beheld the guillotine at the Barrière du Trône, as described by Samson, and the hideous wicker-basket into which the heads were falling. "And as each head rolled into the bloody mass, there arose a cloud of flies from the sawdust, which caused a shout of laughter amongst the populace. Whilst the cry of 'Catch 'em, Samson! catch 'em, Samson!' issued in mockery from the troop of boys who had climbed the lamp-posts of the Octroi, for they were all nobles on that day, who had taken care to have their heads all dressed with powder and pomatum before leaving the prison, as they wished to make a decent appearance before the canaille, and it was the perfume of the *maréchal* powder and the scented essence of jessamine which had attracted this unusual number of flies round the basket." Then again arose before my mental vision the head of Berthier, carried aloft on a pike through the streets of Paris, "and followed by such a swarm of flies that the bearer was compelled to agitate the pike to and fro every now and then in order that the hair worn in long pigtail and ailes de pigeon, according to the fashion of the court, by whisking suddenly round, might brush the buzzing multitude away, and disperse the nuisance, which, as the day advanced, grew more and more troublesome." I had just been reading Pradhomme's Journal, and his account of the

horrid scene was still fresh in my recollection.

As I retraced every detail of the piteous story, and thought over the very words in which the historian had related it, the excitement with which I watched the nauseous insect before me had gradually grown greater until I had unconsciously bent forward by degrees, and my face had come almost into contact with that of the stranger. The agitation of my nerves had now increased to such an extent that at last I felt quite ashamed of my own want of self-control, and passing my hand through my hair, inquired if this really could be myself, who was thus abiding, perplexed and amazed, before the movements of a miserable insect whose very existence I could obliterate by the slightest flip of my finger. By Heavens! now that I thought of it, the temptation was not to be resisted! I folded my hand in the fashion I had learned at school, and perfected by long practice at the studio, resolving to annihilate the creature at once, and, moreover, to accomplish the feat so lightly and so steadily, that if the stranger were really asleep he should not even be awakened from his slumber, just as we used to do to old Rabâche, when in summer the flies settled on his bald head, where they had been invited to assemble by the powdered sugar artistically dropped thereon while he was bending over our performances, and training our crooked lines in the way they should go.

But just at that very moment the creature before me began once more to crawl. The pursuit assumed to my excited fancy the proportions of a chase, and we all know how utterly beyond control are the feelings on such an occasion. Unable to restrain my eagerness, instead of proceeding softly as I had intended, I dashed forward in the most awkward and uncouth manner possible, losing my balance in the frenzy of the moment, and fell upon the young man's bosom with a shock that made the tin case slung across my chest rattle with a startling sound, and the long bag of green baize fall from the outside passenger's knees against the swing-board; its contents, whatever they were, rattling and jingling with a sharp and irritating sound, exactly like that produced by my tin case. The youth started, and the colour came faintly into his cheek, while I stammered forth the most earnest excuses for my awkwardness. But even this shock, rude as it was, did not seem to arouse the young man from his listless attitude. He stretched out his

limbs and yawned. He was very pale, and the dark rings around his eyes seemed somehow to have grown darker than before. The nervous twitching of his fingers and the quivering motion of his eyelids were renewed, and I could not be mistaken when I fancied that his grim friend on the swing-board looked anxiously towards him once or twice, as he made a sign towards the end of the road where the Three Acacias were now visible, tossing their feathery arms to the sky, and seeming to throw light as well as shadow on the space where they stood.

For me, however, all interest was absorbed in my search after the bluebottle fly. It was nowhere to be seen. It had disappeared, scared away, no doubt, by the noise. "It must have flown through the window of the coucou," thought I. And I cannot tell what a relief it was to my heated imagination to find that the creature was gone.

It was not till this conviction had been fully impressed upon me that I turned again to the young man to offer my timid excuses for the apparent rudeness of which I had been guilty. I told him the cause of my brusque attack, and apologised in the choicest terms I could command for the shock I must have occasioned to his nerves. But the youth was evidently too much pre-occupied, or too indifferent at that moment to take offence. He turned a dull heavy gaze upon me, and said:

"Ah, yes! Well I don't wonder—that cursed bluebottle fly! I thought I saw the coachman crush it with the butt-end of his whip! Already did *Bras-de-Fer*," and he pointed with his thumb to the man with the green-baize bag sitting on the swing-board, "declare it must have been the devil himself to have pursued us all the way from Paris only to get us kicked into the ditch. The devil, you know, whose memoirs were written by *Eugène Sue*. Don't you remember? In the diligence, where the abbé tries in vain to divert his thoughts from the lady at his side, and is prevented from perusing his breviary by the persecutions of a bluebottle fly, every time he tries to fix his attention on his prayers? *Bras-de-Fer* never meant to compare my innocence with that of the abbé, you know; quite the reverse. He said that the devil would never have needed to disguise himself for my temptation, if a pretty girl had sat beside me!" And he uttered a weak tuneless titter, the very senility of vice before even its powers were developed.

The foolish laughter without mirth

grated on my taste, and I answered sharply that never having read *Eugène Sue's* novel (which I really had not at that time) I could not judge of the comparison; but that my abhorrence of the horrible insect arose from the superstition of its being gifted with the power of scenting blood, and that its presence conveyed a warning of death or dire misfortune to those honoured by its visit. "But of course *you* are no believer in such things," added I, on observing the start with which the youth had listened to the words.

"Perhaps not—perhaps not," he gasped forth, turning deadly pale and clutching me by the arm with a force of which I should scarcely have deemed him capable, judging by his languid movements and apparently feminine weakness. And then before I had recovered from the astonishment into which his sudden action had thrown me, he had withdrawn his grasp, exclaiming in a tone of childish triumph, "And look you, my friend, if there be aught of truth in the belief, I shall not be alone to suffer, for see, you too must be destined to share in the misfortune."

With a hoarse mocking laugh he flung himself back into his seat, pointing to my shoulder, where my eyes, following his gesture, beheld with horror the loathsome insect which had occasioned all this turmoil actually standing there, seeming to mock me with its cool impudence, and its unconsciousness of all the repulsion with which I gazed upon it. I started up in dismay and shook myself with violence, brushing down the sleeve of my blouse with many an exclamation of disgust. As my rough motion dislodged it, I could distinctly hear its shrill trumpet and the droning buzz which followed, even above the clatter of the horse's hoofs and the creaking of the coucou. The youth laughed aloud with a kind of fiendish delight at the excitement I displayed, then resumed his listless look, and spoke no more. Once he raised the striped curtain at his back and gazed out towards the Three Acacias, then dropping it, suddenly turned away, as a slight colour overspread his cheek and brow, dispelling for a moment its death-like pallor. Was it the excitement of pleasure or of pain? The anticipation of meeting with his riotous companions, or annoyance at being compelled to exertion while still overcome with the fatigue and languor, which I felt sure were the consequence of the orgies of the previous night?

But I did not pause long in farther contemplation of my fellow-traveller. To re-

main thus, confined within that narrow space, with the idea of the continued presence of the hateful fly, was impossible. I beheld it everywhere. I followed the trail of the obnoxious creature amid the tracery of the pattern of the oil-skin lining, detecting its hated presence amongst the folds of the striped curtains, discovering its hideous form in every little shadow, starting with nausea whenever the breeze uplifted the calico, and shuddering with disgust at the rustling sound it made. My brain got distracted and my ears filled with its imaginary hum, until at last, unable to collect my thoughts amid this torture of the nerves created by my fancy, I called aloud to Tony to stop the vehicle, and without a word of courtesy to my fellow-traveller, I jumped to the ground without so much as alighting on the iron step, and plunged blindly into the wooded dell that bordered the alley, up which we were driving to the rising ground, where stood the Three Acacias.

BOLD ROBIN HOOD.

DURING a period reaching nearly four hundred years back, the press has put forth many ballads, tales, narratives, and other compositions relating to that redoubtable but mysterious personage, Robin Hood. It was not very long after the introduction of printing into England that Wynkyn de Worde, about three hundred and eighty years ago, printed the *Lytel Geste of Robyn Hode*—the forerunner of a long series, varying in importance from single broad-sheets to goodly volumes. But the manuscripts are of much earlier date. The earliest mention of these ballads, in any work at present known to exist, is in Robert Longlande's *Vision of Piers Plowman*, written in the reign of Edward the Third. Piers states very frankly, that although he is not quite perfect in the *Paternoster* or *Lord's Prayer*, he knows the song of *Robyn Hode*. The *Lytel Geste*, above mentioned, seems to have been a stringing together of songs and tales long current among the people, some written down, some merely repeated from mouth to mouth. Four hundred and sixty stanzas are devoted to a narration of the daring, odd, shrewdly-devised achievements of Robin, so linked as to furnish a kind of metrical biography. Additions were made during the Tudor times; and it is known that a pastoral comedy called *Robin Hood* was played in London towards the close of Elizabeth's reign.

During nearly the whole of the next century, in the reigns of the two Jameses and the two Charleses, ballads of Robin Hood, mostly printed in black letter, were hawked about the villages, and sung in a kind of recitative. A collection of these was gradually made, and published under the title of *Robin Hood's Garland*; numerous editions were afterwards printed, introduced by what professed to be the life of the hero. With the *Geste* and the *Garland* together, and other ballads and stories from time to time ferreted out by Ritson, Hunter, Stukely, Cunningham, Planché, Gutch, Chappell, and other investigators, the Robin Hood literature has become somewhat considerable.

What, then, are these ballads and tales? What do they tell us? The central figure of the whole of them is a bold outlaw, an expert Bowman, who is virtually lord of Sherwood Forest, and the terror of nobles, magistrates, and priests; but he is kind to the poor, and a respecter of women. The foresters and villagers would rather shield him from the authorities, than aid in capturing him. He gradually surrounds himself with a body of companions, among whom are Little John, Will Scarlet, Friar Tuck, Will Stukely, Arthur-a-Bland, George-a-Green, and a fair damsel named Maid Marian; and one or other of these is generally associated with him in the exploits to which the ballads relate.

Robin Hood and Little John, we are told in one ballad, first encountered each other in this fashion. Robin, a young outlaw of some twenty summers, was roaming the forest one day, when he met John Little, a strapping fellow seven feet high; they met while crossing a wooden plank over a stream; neither would give way; so they fought with quarter-staves till John fairly knocked over Robin into the stream. The outlaw admired the pluck of his conqueror; and the two henceforth became fast friends. Will Scarlet was added to the band by some equally unexpected adventure; and one of the ballads tells how Robin won the heart of Will Stukely by rescuing him from a sheriff's officer. As to Friar Tuck, he is certainly one of the most remarkable members of the community. We are told all about him in a ballad of forty-one verses (they were not frightened at the length of their songs in those days):

In the summer time, when leaves grow green,
And flowers are fresh and gay,
Robin Hood and his merry men
Were all disposed to play.

They had a friendly bout at archery, and

made some good shots; whereupon Will Scarlet declared that he knew a curtell friar who could beat any of them. What this word curtell meant is not now quite certain. Some suppose it to have referred to a cordelier or corded friar, in allusion to the cord or rope worn round the waist by Franciscans, wherewith to flagellate themselves; whereas others suggest that it refers to a friar who wore a curtailed or short tunic. Be this as it may, Robin set forth to seek this curtell friar, who was known as Friar Tuck of Fountains Abbey. They met, and the contest between them was of so marvellous a kind that one might wonder how the ballad ever obtained credence, were it not that the appetite for the marvellous is known to have been singularly keen in those days. Suffice it to say that the strength, skill, and boldness of the friar quite charmed Robin, who induced him to become a member of the forest band. Another, Allen-a-Dale, was won over by a kindness rendered to him on an occasion of doleful sensitiveness. One day,

Robin Hood in the forest stood,
All under the greenwood tree,

when he saw a gaily-attired young man pass by, singing right merrily. On the following day he again saw him, but depressed with woe. Robin accosted him, and asked the meaning of the change. The youth stated that on the previous day he was going to be wedded to his betrothed, but found that her cruel father was forcing her to marry a rich old baron. Robin started forth for the church, and got there just in the nick of time. He ascertained that the youth and the maiden loved each other, whereupon he blew his horn, and his merry men (who always seem to have been close at hand whenever he wanted them) came into the church, and compelled the priest to marry the maiden to Allen-a-Dale.

Robin was evidently fond of fighting, for he liked the men who thrashed him as well as those who were thrashed by him. Arthur-a-Bland, the tanner, furnished a case in point. A rattling ballad tells us that

In Nottingham there lives a jolly tanner,
With a hey, down, down, and a down!
His name is Arthur-a-Bland;
There is ne'er a squire in Nottinghamshire
Dare bid bold Arthur stand.

It chanced that Robin and Arthur met in the forest; a small incitement was sufficient to bring on a contest, in which Arthur was the victor. It then transpired that he was a kinsman of Little John; he joined the band, and Robin, John, and Arthur danced the Three Merry Men's Dance.

As to Maid Marian, she seems to have fallen in love with the hero while yet unknown to him, and to have adopted a mode of revealing her attachment quite orthodox in romance and poetry:

A bonny fair maid of a noble degree,
With a hey, down, down a down down,
Maid Marian called by name,
Lived in the north, of excellent worth,
For she was a gallant dame.

She went to Sherwood in male attire, met Robin, contrived to fight and to be worsted, to yield and to confess, and she became, we will suppose, Mrs. Robin Hood.

One of the ballads relates to Little John and the Four Beggars, showing how he pretended on one occasion to go begging, and met with four hale beggars, who professed to be dumb, deaf, blind, and crippled respectively; how he exposed them, and punished them for their deceit by robbing them of three hundred pounds. Another, a ballad of fifty-eight verses, narrates how Robin Hood, Little John, and Will Scarlet won a victory over the Prince of Aragon and two giants, and how the contest ended by Will marrying a princess who had been rescued from peril. In Robin Hood and the Shepherd, told in twenty-seven verses, a shepherd gets the better both of Robin and of John in turn, and is consequently held in high esteem by Robin. In Robin Hood's Golden Prize we learn in what fashion he robbed two priests of five hundred pounds. Priests and bishops he seems always to have regarded as fair prey. Witness Robin Hood and the Bishop:

Come, gentlemen all, and listen awhile,
With a hey down, down, and a down;
And a story to you I'll unfold.
I'll tell you how Robin Hood served the bishop,
When he robbed him of all his gold.

He got him into the forest by a ruse, tied him to a tree, emptied his pouch, and then made him sing a mass. In Robin Hood and the Bishop of Hereford, another ballad, the bishop is made to dance in his boots after being despoiled. Robin Hood and the Butcher tells us of an odd prank, in which the hero went to Nottingham, pretended to be a butcher in the marketplace, and created quite a ferment among the fraternity:

But when he sold his meat so fast,
No butcher by him could thrive;
For he sold more meat for a penny,
Than others could do for five!

In Robin Hood and the Jolly Tinker, we have one of the many instances in which a good fight leads to fast friendship. A certain tinker was armed with a warrant to capture Robin, who was not aware of this fact at the first encounter:

And as he came to Nottingham,
A tinker he did meet,
And seeing him a lusty blade,
He kindly did him greet.

When Robin found on what errand the tinker was engaged, they settled the matter with the quarter-staff; the result was, as usual, an addition to the members of the band. The Pindar, or pound-keeper, of Wakefield was another hero :

"In Wakefield their lives a jolly pindar,
In Wakefield all on the green,
There is neither knight nor squire," said the pindar,
"Nor baron so bold, nor baron so bold,
Dare make a trespass in the town of Wakefield,
But his pledge goes to the penfold."

Robin Hood, Little John, and Will Scarlet, in some way contravened this rule; whereupon the pindar boldly grappled with all three :

He lean'd his back fast unto a tree,
And his foot against a thorn,
And there he fought a long summer day,
And a summer's day so long,
Till their swords in their broad bucklers
Were broken close to their hands.

Robin so admired the pindar, that he induced him to join the band. One of the ballads declares that Robin Hood slew in an encounter fifteen men who had doubted his courage; and this, too, when he was only as many years old. It opens thus :

Robin Hood was a tall young man,
Of fifteen winters old,
Derry ding dong !
And Robin Hood was a proper young man,
Of courage stout and bold,
Hey derry ding dong !

On one occasion he met a lady weeping. On inquiring into the cause, he found that three of her sons were to be executed at Nottingham for killing the king's deer. This was quite enough for him; he resolved to effect a rescue. Proceeding to the city he sought an interview with the sheriff, professed to be earnest in the king's cause, and asked to be permitted to fill the office of hangman, with the only further privilege of being allowed to make one blast on his horn. The sheriff assented, the arrangements were made, Robin blew his horn, whereupon a hundred and ten of his merry men suddenly appeared. The sheriff, thus knowing who was his formidable visitor, speedily consented to let the three prisoners escape :

"Oh take them, oh take them," says great master
sheriff,
"Oh take them along with thee;
For there's ne'er a man in all Nottingham,
Can do the like of thee!"

It is noteworthy that Robin, in the midst of his wild achievements, was credited with a reverence for the religious services of the church. That this reverence did not ex-

tend to the ecclesiastics is clear enough; his exploits show this, as does a couplet in one of the ballads :

Theyse byshoppes and theyse archebyschoppes,
Ye shall them bete and bynde!

Nevertheless, in his own queer way he had a kind of piety. A very ancient ballad contains four stanzas which notice this characteristic in a curious way :

"This is a mery mornynge," said litulle Johne,
"Be hym that dyed on tre,
A more merry man than I am one
Lives not in Christiante."

"Pluck up thy hert, my dere mayster,
Litulle Johne gan say,
"And think it is a ful fayre time,
In a mornynge of May."

"Ze on thyngre greves me," said Robyne
"And does my hert mych woo,
That I may not so solemn day
To mas nor matyns goo."

"Hit is a fourtnet and more," said hee,
"Syn I my Sauour see;
To-day will I to Notyngham,
With the myght of mylde Marye."

He went, but the seriousness of his errand did not prevent him from playing one of his pranks in the city.

Among the persons with whom Robin, or some of his men, came in contact in various adventures, were the Abbot of St. Mary, the Potter, the Beggar, the Stranger, the Ranger, Sir Richard, and the King, all forming the subjects of distinct ballads. The king, we are told, was the means of bringing the outlaw back to a more regular course of life. Going to Sherwood Forest, with a view of seeing this redoubtable Robin Hood, and accompanied by a force sufficient to insure a capture, the king graciously offered pardon on conditions which Robin accepted. More than one of the ballads tell of the hero's death. He fell sick, and went to a religious house in Yorkshire, the abbess of which was a kinswoman of his. She bled him, and allowed him to bleed to a fatal degree—treacherously, as the songs assert. He longed to see the greenwood once again, and shoot one more arrow before he died. A paraphrase on the old rhymes has been prettily rendered by Bernard Barton :

They rais'd him on his couch, and set
The casement open wide;
Once more, with vain and fond regret,
Fair Nature's face he eyed.

With kindling glance and throbbing heart,
One parting look he cast,
Sped on its way the feather'd dart,
Sank back, and breath'd his last.

And where it fell they dug his grave,
Beneath the greenwood tree;
Meet resting-place for one so brave,
So lawless, frank, and free!

In reference to the music to which these

singularly interesting old ballads were set, Mr. Chappell, the experienced author of the volumes on the Popular Music of the Olden Time, finds that it was very plain and simple, easy to sing—a necessary condition in such very lengthy compositions. Robin Hood and the Bishop of Hereford was in two-four time; Robin Hood and the Friar in six-eight time, and in the minor mode; and so was Robin Hood and the Pindar of Wakefield. On examining many of the ballads, in the second line of which there comes a “hey down-a-down down,” or something of the kind, Mr. Chappell finds that they were all, or nearly all, set to the same tune. This was the case with Robin Hood and the Stranger, Robin Hood and the Beggar, Robin Hood and the Four Beggars, Robin Hood and the Bishop, Robin Hood’s Chase, Robin Hood and the Tanner, Robin Hood and the Butcher, Robin Hood and the Ranger, and Robin Hood and Maid Marian. In many of the ballads the last line is repeated as a chorus.

And now, what are we to think of all this? Did Robin Hood ever really live? Was he a reality, or only a myth? There are writers who refuse to give credence to his actual existence. It has been urged, by one or other of these critics, that the origin of the ballads may be accounted for on other grounds. It has been urged that Robin Hood was not a patronymic, but a purely descriptive name, applied to the ideal personification of a class—the outlaws of the olden time. Robin’s fame extended to Scotland and France as well as throughout England. Eugène Sue, in one of his novels, gives the name of Robin de Bois to a mysterious character employed by French mothers to frighten their children. Grimm, in his German mythology, speaks of the hood or hoodiken assigned in fairy tales to Robin Goodfellow and other elves; and it is inferred that Robin Hood may be simply Robin o’ the Hood, not a veritable man, but a mischievous denizen of fairyland. Some settle down into the prosaic explanation that, as there were in the Middle Ages many Englishmen with the surname of Hood, and many with the Christian name of Robin, the chances are in favour of there having been some one man with both names; but that this need not involve a belief in the stories and ballads as being true narratives. A Gloucestershire writer states that, in that county, the peasants often pronounce W like H, converting Wood into Hood, and Robin’s Wood Hill into Robin Hood’s Hill. Hallam says that, in the Provençal pastoral poems of the

twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Robin Hood and Maid Marian often appear as the names of a shepherd and his rustic lover.

There is, however, a greater concurrence of testimony to support a belief that a man named Robin Hood really lived some six centuries ago, and really disported himself as an outlaw in Sherwood Forest. The Reverend Joseph Hunter has found, in a household book of the court of Edward the Second, an entry to the effect that one Robyn Hode was among the vadtlets, valets, varlets, or porters of the chamber in the king’s palace. This is regarded as giving some support to the account which forms the burden of many of the tales and ballads, and which may be thus summarised: That Robin Hood was born at Locksley in the time of Henry the Second; that his real name was Robert Fitzoothes, some say Earl of Huntingdon; that he was a wild extravagant youth, who got into debt and difficulties; that he became an outlaw in Sherwood Forest, where he surrounded himself with the companions already named; that he enlisted all he could of those who were brave and bold, and good archers; that he and his bowmen, something like a hundred in number, made war against every one except the poor and the weak, and moved about from place to place when attacked; that the forest supplied them with venison and firewood, while the villagers were made to furnish other necessities and comforts, either by purchase or by more summary means; that the king pardoned Robin, after an interview; that Robin was quietly in the royal service for a considerable time; and that he died at Kirtley Nunnery, Yorkshire, in the reign of Henry the Third. There is, it is true, an awkward chronological hitch here; because if Robin Hood died in the time of Henry the Third, he could not well have been the Robin who lived in the days of Edward the Second. Where the arrow fell resulting from poor Robin’s last shot was on a spot not far from Wakefield; and antiquaries agree that some years ago there was really a grave at that spot, with sods beneath the head and feet ends, and a stone bearing the inscription or epitaph:

Here undernead dis laill stean
Lais Robert Earl of Huntingdon.
Ne’er arcir vez az hie sa geud,
An pipi kauld im Robyn Heud.
Sich utlawes az hi an is men
Vil England nivir si agen.

One thing is pretty certain. Neither antiquary or etymologist will ever kill Robin Hood. He will live in popular belief as

he has lived for centuries past, though not perhaps so entirely unquestioned. Shakespeare mentions him in *As You Like It*, where the duke and his followers live in the Forest of Arden, "like the old Robin Hood of England." Sir Walter Scott, in *Ivanhoe*, brings in a bold archer, named Locksley the Yeoman, as one of the characters. Richard Cœur de Lion pardons Locksley for some misdeeds, and addresses him:

"And thou, brave Locksley——"

"Call me no longer Locksley, my liege, but know me under the name which, I fear, fame hath blown too widely not to have reached even your royal ears. I am Robin Hood, of Sherwood Forest."

"King of outlaws, prince of good fellows," said Richard, who declared that the name was well known, even as far as Palestine; "be assured, brave outlaw, that no deed done in our absence, and in the turbulent times to which it has given rise, shall be remembered to thy disadvantage."

Meanwhile we have many local names to refresh the memory: such as Robin Hood's Well, near Locksley, or Loxley; the Robin Hood and Little John hostelry at Sheffield; Robin Hood's Spring, Robin Hood's Moss, Robin Hood's Wood, Robin Hood's Bow, at Fountains Abbey; Robin Hood's Cap and Slippers, at St. Anne's Well; Robin Hood's Bay, on the Yorkshire coast; Robin Hood's Hill, in Derbyshire; Robin Hood's Stride, in the same county; and Robin Hood's Wind, in Lancashire—where this name is given to a thaw wind, a wind blowing during the thawing of snow, which Robin is said to have declared was the only wind which he could not withstand.

CASTAWAY.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "BLACK SHEEP," "WRECKED IN PORT," &c. &c.

BOOK III.

CHAPTER IV. VISITORS.

ALTHOUGH her mind was sufficiently made up as to the course which she would pursue, Madge thought it would be advisable to take counsel with Mr. Drage, and accordingly, early the next morning, she set off for the rectory. She intended to tell Mr. Drage that Philip Vane was coming to Wheatcroft on a matter of business, but did not think it necessary to explain what that business was, nor to acquaint the rector with the information which she had gleaned by unravelling the mysteries of the cipher telegram. It would be sufficient, she

thought, to tell Mr. Drage that she intended to keep herself concealed during the time her husband was at Wheatcroft; and, by every means in her power, to prevent him having the slightest idea of her connexion with Sir Geoffry's establishment.

She found the rector taking his morning walk round the garden, with little Bertha trotting by his side. Directly she caught sight of Madge, the child rushed towards her, putting up her face to be kissed, and clinging to Madge's gown with both hands.

"We were talking about you just now, Mrs. Pickering," said the child. "I was asking papa why you did not come back and live here. We should like it so much, pa and I would, and it would be so much more cheerful for you than staying with that cross old gentleman at Wheatcroft."

"My dear Bertha," said Madge, with a grave smile, "I should like to be with you very much, but I cannot come."

"So papa said," cried the child, turning to Mr. Drage, who had just come up. "I suppose as papa cannot have you here, that is the reason he has bought a portrait of you?"

"A portrait of me!" cried Madge, looking towards the rector with uplifted eyebrows.

"Bertha, my darling, how can you be so ridiculous," said the rector. "The fact is, Mrs. Pickering, that when at Bircester the other day, I saw in a shop window a print of a saint's head, by some German artist, and I was so struck with it, that I could not resist purchasing it."

"Yes, and he has had it nailed up over the mantelpiece in his bedroom, Mrs. Pickering; and when I told him the other day that I thought it was like you, his face grew quite red. Didn't it, papa?"

"Now run away, darling, and don't talk nonsense," said the rector, whose cheeks were burning; then as the child darted off, he turned to his visitor and said, "Have you any news, Mrs. Pickering, as you are away from home so early?"

"I have indeed," she replied, "and strange news. Philip Vane is coming to Wheatcroft!"

"Good Heavens!" cried the rector. "That woman has told him of your visit to her."

"Oh, no," said Madge, with a smile, "she has not told him; she will not tell him. She has determined to play the game out in her own way, and to run the risk. No, Mr. Vane is coming with another gentleman from London to see Sir Geoffry on business."

The rector gave a sudden start, and a

bright eager look crossed his face, but died away immediately.

"He will be at Wheatcroft, then, some little time?" he said.

"He will pass one night there," replied Madge. "The distance from London is too great for them to return the same day. Besides, they have business to discuss with Sir Geoffry which will probably take some hours."

"What do you intend to do?"

"I intend asking Sir Geoffry's permission to remain in my room. In the ordinary course of events, a person in my position would not be brought into contact with company remaining for so short a period in the house; and it is only through Sir Geoffry's courtesy and consideration that I take a more prominent place in the household. I shall retire to my room when they arrive, and remain there until after their departure. The name of Mrs. Pickering, the housekeeper, will doubtless be mentioned occasionally, but it is one which Mr. Vane has never heard of in connexion with me, and will convey to his mind no idea of me whatsoever. Do you approve of what I propose doing?"

"Perfectly," said Mr. Drage, with a nervous and excited air. "It is most important that your husband should not know of your presence in this place. You feel tolerably certain that Mrs. Bendixen has not acquainted him with your visit?"

"I feel quite certain of it," said Madge. "Her last words to me were convincing on that point."

"Then Mr. Vane will stay over the night at Wheatcroft. Who is the other gentleman who is coming down with him?"

"The chairman of the company of which Mr. Vane is the general manager."

"The chairman! Oh, then it is through him that the business will principally be conducted; and Mr. Vane is probably only coming down to be referred to on points of detail. Is he a man likely to walk out much while he is here?"

"What an extraordinary question!" said Madge. "I can scarcely understand what you mean."

"I meant was he fond of exercise? Some men whose lives are passed in the City are delighted at every chance of getting into the fresh air. However, I only asked for the sake of something to say. I think you are perfectly right in what you propose, my dear Mrs. Pickering, and I would recommend you to take every precaution that your intentions are not frustrated."

He spoke in a nervous, jerky manner,

quite foreign to his nature, and half put forth his hand, as though about to wish her good-bye. It was evident that he was anxious for her departure, so Madge, wondering much what could have so strangely moved her friend, took her leave. The rector accompanied her to the gate, and then, returning to his study, turned the key in the lock, and, falling upon his knees, prayed long and fervently.

When Madge arrived at Wheatcroft she found Sir Geoffry in a state of great excitement.

"I have received a letter from these gentlemen, Mrs. Pickering," he said, "and they will be here at mid-day to-morrow. Very luxurious fellows for men of business they seem to be too. Springside is too far distant from London for them to complete the journey in one day; they must sleep at Bircester forsooth. Deuced easy style this Mr. Delabole writes in too; says he has no doubt that, after I have perused the private papers which he intends bringing with him, and listened to all he has to say, I shall be convinced of the excellence of the undertaking, and that he shall carry away the deed duly inscribed with my name. He speaks so confidently that the investment which he proposes must be a very sound one, or else he must have but a poor opinion of my business qualifications. I dare say he thinks it will be easy enough, with specious words and cooked accounts, to get over an old soldier; however, that will remain to be proved. You will be quite ready for the reception of these gentlemen, Mrs. Pickering, and will make them comfortable, I am sure."

"You may depend upon their being made perfectly comfortable, Sir Geoffry," said Madge. "There will, I presume, be no occasion for my being in attendance when they are here?"

"None in the world," said Sir Geoffry, promptly.

"I mean that I shall not be called upon to see them, and that I may keep to my room during their stay?"

"Certainly, if you wish it," said Sir Geoffry. "But you know, Mrs. Pickering, that I am rather proud of you, and——"

"I am a little over-fatigued by my journey, and I dread any introduction to strangers, fearing I might absolutely break down. I——"

"Don't say another word about it; you shall do exactly as you please, and no stress shall be laid upon you. Sensitive woman that," said the old general to himself, looking after Madge's retreating figure, "high-spirited, and all that kind of thing. Does

not mind the people about here, but doesn't like strangers. Is afraid, I suppose, of meeting people who knew her in better days, and who would be ashamed of recognising her in her present position. Now I must once more look through the papers which Irving sent to me, and coach myself up in readiness to meet these gentlemen from the City."

Punctual to its time, the train containing the two gentlemen arrived at the Springside station the following morning, and Mr. Delabole, hopping briskly out, called a fly, then turned back to assist his companion in extricating their luggage from the carriage. There were but few persons on the platform, for it was an early and unfashionable train; but amongst them was a tall, thin man, of stooping figure, dressed in a long clergyman's coat, who hovered round the two strangers, and seemed to take particular notice of them—such particular notice as to attract Mr. Vane's attention, and induce him to inquire jocularly of Mr. Delabole "Who was his friend?" Whereupon Mr. Delabole stared with easy assurance at the tall gentleman, and told Mr. Vane "that their friend was probably a parson who had got wind of the rich marriage Mr. Vane was about to make, and had come there to draw him of a little money for the local charities."

They drove straight to Wheatcroft, and on their arrival were received with much formality and politeness by Sir Geoffry, who told them that luncheon was awaiting them. During the discussion of this meal, at which the three gentlemen alone were present, the conversation was entirely of a social character; Springside, its natural beauties and its mineral waters; the style of persons frequenting it; the differences between a town and country life—were all lightly touched upon. The talk then drifted into a discussion on the speculative mania which had recently laid such hold upon English society, then filtering off into a narrow channel of admiration for Mr. Irving and his Midas-like power, worked back into the broad stream of joint-stock companies and rapid fortune-making, and finally settled down upon the Terra del Fuegos mine. During this conversation, Sir Geoffry had given utterance to various caustic remarks, and what he imagined were unpleasant truths, all of which, though somewhat chafed at by Mr. Vane, were received by Mr. Delabole, who acted as spokesman for himself and his friend, with the greatest suavity, and were replied to with the utmost coolness and good

temper. The promptitude which his companion displayed in seizing upon every word uttered by their host as a personal matter was not without its effect upon Mr. Delabole. When Sir Geoffry pushed his chair back from the table and suggested that they should adjourn to the library, there to discuss the object of their visit, Mr. Delabole said:

"If you have no objection, Sir Geoffry, I think that this question will be more likely to be brought to a speedy conclusion if it is left to you and me. My friend Mr. Vane is invaluable in all matters of detail, and when we come to them we can request him to favour us with his presence; for the old saying of two being better company than three holds good in business discussions as well as in social life, and if you have no objection, I think the basis of any arguments which are to be made between our friend Irving, represented by you, and the company represented by me, would better be settled by us alone."

Sir Geoffry bowed stiffly enough. "Whatever Mr. Delabole thought he should be happy to agree to. From the position which Mr. Delabole held in the City, it was quite evident that in such a talk as they proposed to have, he, by himself, would be more than a match for an old retired Indian officer."

Mr. Delabole smiled at this speech. "There was, he hoped, no question of brains or ingenuity in it. If the stability and excellence of the investment did not by themselves persuade Sir Geoffry to advise his friend to embark in it—and he hoped to embark in it a little himself—no blandishments of his should be brought forward to bring about that end. It was simply a question of confidence and figures, not of listening to compliments and blarney. He would willingly retire with the general into the library, while his good friend Mr. Vane would perhaps stroll about the grounds, taking care to be within call if his valuable services were required."

His good friend, Mr. Vane, who during luncheon had been paying particular attention to some old and remarkable Madeira which was on the table, did not seem at all to relish this plan. At first, he seemed inclined to make some open remonstrance, but a glance from underneath Mr. Delabole's bushy eyebrows dissuaded him therefrom, and he contented himself by shrugging his shoulders and indulging in other mild signs of dissent and objection. Previously to retiring with Mr. Delabole, Sir Geoffry, with punctilious courtesy, ac-

accompanied Mr. Vane to the hall-door; pointed out to him where were the pleasantest walks in the grounds, how best to reach the spots from whence the favourite views were to be obtained, and handed him the keys of the conservatory and the gates opening into the home park. Mr. Vane received all this politeness very coolly, inwardly determining to take the first opportunity of revenging himself on Mr. Delabole for the unceremonious treatment received at that gentleman's hands.

Left to himself, Mr. Vane strolled idly about the grounds switching the heads off the flowers with his cane, and cursing Delabole's impudence for having relegated him to the duties of the second fiddle.

"Make the best of your time, my good friend," said he, stretching himself upon a bench shaded by the overhanging branches of a large tree, "make the best of your time, to swagger and give yourself airs, and show that you are the head of the concern; while I am, or am supposed to be, only one of its paid officers; for within a week, or ten days at the outside, I shall be my own master, and if you attempt anything of that kind with me then, I shall be in a position to tell you my opinion of you in the very plainest language. Don't think I have not noticed of late how very tightly you have drawn the rope which binds me to you! Telegraphed for when I am away, told to go here and there, to find out this and that, brought down here and shunted on one side, as though I were a mere clerk, whose business it is to make memoranda of what may pass between their excellencies! Oh, my good friend Delabole, you may take your oath I will not forget this. When once my marriage with Mrs. Bendixen is an accomplished fact, and I have the knowledge that I am beyond any harm which you could do me, then you shall taste the leek which you have compelled me so frequently of late to swallow. I will put my foot on your neck, as you have put yours on mine, I will—Hullo, who's this coming this way? One of the gardeners, I suppose. No, by Jove! the parson who was at the station, and who seemed to take such interest in us and our movements. What can he want? He must be a friend of Sir Geoffry's, and makes his way through the grounds as a short cut from one part of his parish to the other. He will see I am a friend of the general's, and will want to enter into conversation. I hate parsons, and shan't take any notice of him."

With this amiable resolve, Mr. Vane

curled up his feet beneath him on the bench, pulled out a cigar, and was just about to light it, when, glancing up from under the brim of his hat, he saw the clergyman standing beside him.

Philip Vane dropped the cigar, and sprang to his feet.

"Who are you?" he cried, "and what are you doing here?"

"There is no occasion for you to disturb yourself," said the new comer, quietly lifting his hat. "My name is Drage, and I am rector of one of the parishes in Spring-side. I am speaking to Mr. Philip Vane, I believe?"

"That's my name," said Vane, shortly, and resuming his seat, "though I cannot imagine how you knew it, unless you read it off my portmanteau, when you were dodging about the station this morning."

"I knew it before I was dodging about the station, as you are politely pleased to say," said Mr. Drage; "I know a great deal more about you, as you will find out, before this interview is at an end!"

"The deuce you do!" said Philip Vane, with a cynical smile; "I did not know my fame had extended to these parts. And what do you know about me, pray, Mr.—I forget your name."

"My name, I repeat, is Drage!"

"Drage—Drage," muttered Vane. "Any relation of Drage, of Abchurch-lane?"

"His son."

"A most respectable man, holding a leading position in the City. My dear Mr. Drage, I am delighted to make your acquaintance." And he held out his hand.

"I do not think," said Mr. Drage, taking no notice of the movement; "I do not think that you will be quite so pleased to make my acquaintance when you have heard all I have to say!"

Philip Vane looked hard at his companion, and noted with astonishment the hectic flush in his cheeks, the brightness of his eyes, the mobile working of his mouth.

"You may say what you please," he said, shortly. "It is a matter of perfect indifference to me. If you were in the City, your father or your father's clerks could tell you what position I hold there. City men are careful of what they say of each other; but you are a parson, and are privileged, I suppose?"

"I am a parson. It was in that capacity I became acquainted with the circumstances, the knowledge of which has induced me to seek you out. You are about to be married, Mr. Vane?"

"The dullest of laymen could have told

me that," said Mr. Vane, again with a cynical smile; "the report was in the newspapers."

"Exactly; but the point I am coming to has not yet found its way into the newspapers, though it will probably be published ere long."

"And it is——?"

"It is that you are married already!"

As Mr. Drage pronounced these words, a chill crept over Philip Vane, and for an instant he felt stupefied. But he speedily recovered himself, and looking his companion straight in the face, said:

"Either you have been befooled yourself, or you are trying to make a fool of me. In the latter case a hopeless and dangerous experiment."

"I should not attempt to put my wits in antagonism to yours," said the rector, quietly, "but facts have been said to be stubborn things, and the marriage register of Chepstow Church, with the signature of Philip Vane and Margaret Pierrepont in one of its pages, is still extant!"

"Who told you of this?" asked Vane, breathing hard and speaking low.

"Your injured and deserted wife!"

"Is the woman who once passed under that name still alive?" inquired Vane, anxiously.

"The lady who has the terrible misfortune to hold that position," said the rector, drawing himself up and looking at his companion with disgust, "is alive and well."

"And you come from her?"

"No, I am here on her behalf, but not with her knowledge."

There was a momentary silence, broken by Vane, who said: "And what is your object in seeking this interview with me?"

"To warn you that I am cognisant of the position in which you stand; to warn you against the commission of the crime which you contemplate——"

"And to ask for a round sum to buy off the opposition of yourself and your interesting accomplice. Is not that it, Mr. Drage?"

"You scoundrel!" said Mr. Drage. "Do you dare to address such language to me—a clergyman?"

"If it comes to a question of language," said Vane, with a laugh, "I believe that 'scoundrel' is scarcely a term much bandied about in clerical society. As a matter of fact, I have found many gentlemen of your cloth not less open to a bribe than the rest of the world."

"You shall find one at least who scorns to discuss even the possibility of such an arrangement. Let us bring this interview to a close; you will clearly understand my object in seeking it. I came to warn you that if you persevered in carrying out this marriage, I will most assuredly hand you over to the law!"

"And I warn you that if you interfere in my business, I will kill you!" said Philip Vane, savagely.

"Such a threat has no terrors for me," said the rector.

"Perhaps not," said Vane, with a contemptuous glance at his companion's feeble frame; "however, I will find some means of bringing you and your client to reason."

"Stay," cried Mr. Drage, "I did not come here to bandy threats, but simply to discharge a duty. I will take no answer from you now, irritated as you are by the discovery that your position is known to me. Think over what I have said, and save yourself from the commission of this great sin. If you have occasion to write to me you know where I am to be found."

Philip Vane hesitated, then bowing his head, he said in a low tone:

"You are right. Do not think any more of the wild words I uttered in my rage; leave me to think over the circumstances in which I am placed, and the manner in which I can best extricate myself from the danger into which I was about to plunge. Leave me and—Heaven bless you for your kindness."

Mr. Drage looked at him with brimming eyes, and lifting his hat slowly walked off.

"That was the best way of settling him," said Philip Vane to himself, as he watched the rector down the path. "I must push this marriage on at once, and make some excuse for its being perfectly quiet."

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